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ABSTRACT

This paper defines regionalism, sets some tentative directions for the concept, and raises difficult questions related to its application in New York State. Regionalism, which offers an alternative to a State-local school governing system, is used to decentralize the planning and management of public services. A regional unit permits district officials, particularly those in metropolitan areas, to join together as an elected or appointed board to determine basic policies. A pragmatic, evolutionary approach to promoting regionalism from within the existing arrangement is proposed. (JF)

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CONSTRUCTING A STATE POLICY TO PROMOTE
REGIONALISM IN SCHOOL GOVERNMENT

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The University of the State of New York
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FOREWORD

It should be obvious that local control of education has shifted to meet the varying conditions of the times. Beginning with the common school district where the schoolhouse was within walking distance of each child, the district concept has changed and developed. A truly regional framework for education may be the next step in this process. Whether it is or not, the idea deserves careful consideration and examination. The choice of local control with great disparities of resources is no more appealing than the alternative of strong centralized state control.

Throughout the past year Commissioner Nyquist has urged those responsible for education in the State Education Department, in local school districts, and in Boards of Cooperative Educational Services to give careful consideration to extending plans for greater regional operation of education as a next logical step in the development of the Boards of Cooperative Educational Services. The need for improving the quality of education through greater scope and breadth as in the regional vocational schools and for promoting economy of operation through efficiently sized units for special programs gives an impetus to this approach. Organizational structure, financing, and the sharing of powers all present problems which will require refinements of present operation.

During the fall of 1969 Herbert F. Johnson, Deputy Commissioner of Education, asked several of us in the Department

to meet and discuss the concept of educational regionalism. The purposes of the meeting were twofold: (1) to effect better communications among those units of the Department interested in regional activities and (2) to strengthen and coordinate Department regional activities. Perhaps a third reason was an effort to set in motion a continuing dialogue on the subject. The group met twice with the following units of the Department represented: Joseph Amyot, Center for Planning; Donald Benedict, School Supervision; John Bishop, School District Organization; Anthony J. Capuano, Division of Educational Finance; William Firman, Research; Francis E. Griffin, Educational Administration and Supervision; Alan Hoffman, Center for Planning; Norman Kurland, Center for Planning; John Polley, Educational Finance and Management Services; Bruce Shear, Pupil Personnel Services.

During the discussions, it was suggested that a paper be prepared on regionalism to use as a basis for further meetings. This paper has been developed by Jerome Zukowsky with the assistance of John Polley, Francis E. Griffin, A. Buell Arnold, Anthony J. Capuano, Joseph Amyot, and Richard Lesser. This paper defines regionalism, sets some tentative directions, and raises some difficult questions. Since most educators in New York State are not certain what shape or shapes regionalism will take, except perhaps for vocational education, special education, and data processing, it is hoped that this paper may provide assistance in answering some of the important questions. It is also hoped that the paper will be helpful as a basis for further planning, especially in the area of structural arrangements.

Stanley L. Raub
Associate Commissioner for
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CONSTRUCTING A STATE POLICY TO PROMOTE
REGIONALISM IN SCHOOL GOVERNMENT

The process of change we call urbanization has brought deep and pervasive criticism of how our instruments of state and local government are structured and function.

For many decades such criticism, reflecting unease among informed observers, has been directed toward those governments we call "general" such as counties, cities, towns, and villages, particularly in metropolitan areas. There the problems posed by growth of population and demands for public services and facilities are believed to be of an order that the many small or individual governments cannot cope with effectively. Either new instruments of government or a radical change in power and responsibility of existing ones is called for.

In recent years, the state-local system of regulating and financing public elementary and secondary education has come under similar attack. Here, also, attention centers on metropolitan areas where most of the people and problems of providing educational services are located and where there are increasingly higher expectations of the educational process on the part of both city and suburban dwellers.

The burden of this criticism is that the state must take a much larger role in providing funds and basic policy decisions regarding their use to meet the imperative of equal educational opportunity for every child. This position has forcefully been stated by, among others, Mr. James Conant, the U. S. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, and the Governor's Commission on Educational Reform in Michigan, whose recommendations were the basis for sweeping constitutional and statutory changes submitted by Gov. William G. Milliken to the Legislature late last year. Although the proposals vary, they all include or assume a state educational organization that furnishes much or most of the funds necessary to operate the public schools and either statewide or regional organizations empowered to deal with such issues as capital construction, employee contract bargaining, district reorganization, staffing, and programs. Robert Bendiner, in his recently published study, "The Politics of Schools: A Crisis in Self-Government," makes a detailed critique of the capacity of local school governments to deal with the major pressures of urbanization and the growth of employee labor organization, although his chief recommendation is state creation of metropolitan or regional school boards constructed along the lines of the Metropolitan Toronto board established in 1954.

The fundamental issue that emerges from such discussions, either as a result of it or perhaps because of it, is the balance to be struck between state and local interest in the planning, financing, and management of educational services. The State must act to alter the existing balance of powers and responsibilities that inhere in the present state-local or shared system and create new or modified instruments of school government to express this change.

There are many reasons for believing that a highly centralized state system, in which the state furnishes the bulk of operating funds for local schools and directly or indirectly controls the regional, state, or local administrative agents that disburse such funds, cannot be taken seriously as a guide to policy in New York State. This State has, in the opinion of those experts who surveyed local government arrangements for the 1967 Constitutional Convention, the strongest home rule tradition and practice of any state in the union and there is no reason to believe that substantial alteration of this tradition, which infuses State law and the Constitution, can or should be acceptable to legislators, local officials, or citizens. This tradition has yielded home rule powers for cities, counties, towns, and villages, creating a widespread sharing of power and funds for all public services. Although somewhat chaotic in shape and lacking any clearly

defined theory or form, the shared system of power for services and facilities meets the needs of the State's extremely diverse communities well. We have both a strong State tax system as well as a strong local one of great complexity but also great sensitivity to local needs. New York was the first to implement a state-local tax-sharing system, for example, embodied in its per capita general aid distribution. This was greatly augmented in the 1970 Session.

Yet, it is also clear that the state-local school governing system does lack a crucial element that increasingly is being used to decentralize the planning and management of public services. This is a broadly based or regional unit that permits local officials, particularly in metropolitan areas, to join together as an elected or appointed board, to determine basic policies. The State's regional public facilities authorities and corporations serve this function, and parks, library, natural resources conservation, and transportation programs are administered through a variety of regional agencies, some no more than planning bodies but others with very substantial independent power. Urban county governments under home rule charters, as the Joint Legislative Committee on Metropolitan and Regional Areas Study points out in its reports of 1967 and 1968, serve as regional governing units for upstate urban areas and for

large parts of the New York City metropolitan area. Increasing functions have been assumed by these governments and their tax resources are being used to pay for such functions, thus helping equalize the radical disparities in taxable property available to individual cities, towns, and villages within them.

The Joint Committee has termed the development of such instruments "regionalism." It advocates State policies to promote their evolution as a means of working toward effective regional decision-making in which local and State interests can be balanced and harmonized. Through them the larger common interests of many small units can be expressed by an organization under local control.

Regionalism as an approach to policy seeking measures to meet the challenges of growth has been endorsed by State Education Commissioner Ewald B. Nyquist as a feasible alternative to either doing nothing or seeking a centralized State system to mobilize human and economic resources. In January 1970, he observed that there was a need for an "intermediate arrangement" between the State and the many local school governments which would act as a regional planning and management agency. In his address on the future trends in the coming decade, the Commissioner said:

"The task that lies ahead is to find the most viable arrangement so that New York State will

have a structure of services intermediate between the State and the local district. We at the State level need an intermediate arrangement through which to render to your local districts many of the services that we can no longer do effectively on a state-wide basis. The vitality and even continuation of local districts depends upon the creation of effective intermediate service areas that can do for the participating districts what they cannot as effectively do for themselves."

Both the Commissioner and the Joint Committee, however, eschewed the tendency to formulate new or "ideal" configurations of regions to be served by instruments with clearly defined powers and relations to other school governments (and the State or to propose specific functions for them.)

Rather, they urged a pragmatic and evolutionary approach based on identifying the existing elements and impulses within the system on which to build grander structures; that is, promoting regionalism from within the existing arrangements rather than attempting to impose or conceive of a more logical, neat, and orderly system on paper. The latter has the virtues of boldness and clarity but the weakness of limited utility and acceptability. The pragmatic approach may appear more limited and vague but because it is or should be closely linked with the processes, impulses, and instruments already in being and evolution, has a chance of being accepted as the basis for legislation and administrative directive. The most important task in constructing a policy built in

this way is to identify the elements of a regional decision-making system and formulate proposals to build upon it respecting progress already made and tolerating a certain disorder and selectivity in application.

The most obvious and important of the embryonic building blocks so conceived, as both the Commissioner and the Joint Committee have pointed out, is the system of Boards of Cooperative Educational Services, or BOCES. They are products of the growing impulse to regionalize the planning and administration of school services. There is ample evidence of this tendency in the evolution of regional planning centers funded under provisions of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, school study councils, county and multicounty organizations of school board members, professional administrators, and employees and the development of regional approaches to State programs such as that of the Division of Educational Management Services for computer services.

Established in State law since 1948 and now numbering 53 boards, the BOCES organizations cover major portions of the State's urban areas, are well accepted by citizens, school boards, and administrators, and are responsible for planning and managing about \$100 million of educational services of which approximately 60 percent is provided by State funds. The recent and rapid growth of BOCES, although still a small part of the total educational services system,

indicates that the process of regionalization is no longer a question of feasibility or acceptability but how it may be encouraged to develop further. The fundamental premise of any regionalism policy is already established in law and practice; it is the task of the future to enhance its applicability to a broader range of problems and deepen its impact on school government activities.

If we examine the present BOCES structure, it is apparent that two problems require consideration, and are intimately related.

The first is the obvious weakness in the jurisdiction of BOCES in metropolitan areas. The largest school systems in the State are excluded by law from participating in a BOCES and each of the six largest city systems is thus surrounded by school districts organized into a BOCES district. These are the boards in New York City, Yonkers, Albany, Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo. Also, the most densely populated areas are served by BOCES boards whose number and geographical coverage are a product of circumstance and evolution and should be rationalized as part of an overall program. In Nassau County, a significant development 2 years ago was the creation of one BOCES for the county's 56 school governments; in neighboring Suffolk County, with about the same total population, there are three BOCES.

Onondaga is covered by one, Monroe by two, and Erie county by two with another covering a part of its natural economic hinterland in Niagara County.

The second problem is the relationship of BOCES and all school governments to the regional planning centers and regional services programs developed by the State and how they may be related to an effort to expand and strengthen BOCES as a regional instrument.

We shall take up each in the order presented.

The time has come to recognize the fact that the exclusion of the "Big Six" school systems is not the problem it is often assumed to be by either the representatives of such systems, other districts, or officials within the Education Department. It is not simply a matter of fiscal "fairness" or equity in the distribution of State aid nor simply a matter of permitting the Big Six schools to organize their own BOCES as they have urged.

The exclusion of the largest school systems poses a problem of a far different order. For it reinforces and is part of the threatening separation of city and suburban citizens and city and suburban governments that prevents joint action on problems that do not respect local government boundaries. This exclusion is yet another illustration of State policy

that treats cities as distinct and separate entities and their suburbs as other distinct and separate ones. Even if each is treated "equally" in dollars, formulas, and programs, it is a separate but equal policy that is as damaging to the development of the capacity of local officials to discern their common destiny and take steps to meet it as it is to individuals segregated by race or economic status. The exclusion violates the fundamental fact of metropolitan existence. It not only must be removed but imaginative steps taken to encourage all school governments, including many smaller city boards, to participate in a BOCES organization if the State is to treat metropolitan areas as a whole.

The way to do this is to develop a program to establish a unified BOCES within metropolitan areas in which city and suburban school governments may be members of a single organization.

If a base broader than individual districts is useful for planning and managing a host of specialized high-cost services which individual districts cannot as effectively provide themselves, as the evolution of BOCES proves, then the concept should be extended as the principal effort of any policy seeking a means of enhancing the capacity of local

districts to solve their own problem". It makes little sense to have a special services regional system like a doughnut -- with the largest systems as the hole -- and if priorities must be established, the first obviously is the problem created by the largest of such holes, where the benefits of a regional approach would be greatest in terms of numbers of children affected and dollars for school services spent.

The New York City situation presents such special problems of scale, politics, and economics as to make it extremely difficult to proceed there with integration of city-suburban relationships as it would in the remaining five large city systems except perhaps for the most informal kind of ad hoc advisor group inspired by enlightened State leadership. Representatives of the Nassau and Westchester BOCES might find exploration of future courses of joint action useful. But the current drastic changes being worked within the city's school government structure would appear to preclude any effective joint action until conditions are far more stable than they are likely to be for some time.

A common BOCES organization serving Yonkers, Albany, Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo and their suburban neighbors would become the basis for further evolution of what Commissioner Nyquist called an intermediate services arrangement. The

question arises as to the extent of the geographical coverage to be secured. Given the differences within the metropolitan areas of these five cities it is apparent that no rule of thumb will hold for all of them and there is no theoretical basis on which to determine in the abstract a formula or "ideal" region. The State must proceed as experimentally and pragmatically as possible, leaving as much to common sense and local determination and support as possible, and relying as much as possible on permissive legislation and discretionary authority of the Commissioner for each area. The equivalent of at least one-county coverage, however, should be considered a minimum, with appropriate provisions in law or policy to permit gradual additions of contiguous districts under specified conditions, building outward from the most populous school districts centered on the large cities.

In counties where the "Big Five" systems are located, merger of existing BOCES would be necessary for immediate and practical reasons where two or more exist as in Erie, Monroe, and Westchester. If a large city board did join, it would permit the formation of one large board in which city and suburban interests could be balanced far better than if a city board were required or permitted to join only the one BOCES serving part of its suburban ring. The merger of such existing boards would appear either necessary as a prior

condition of forming a larger board or necessary as part of it. The approach to this problem may inspire further consideration of policy to guide consolidation of BOCES in other populous areas as well as rural ones.

A major challenge, as well as a major opportunity, presented by the inclusion of the Big Five systems is that presented by the problems of representation and fiscal incentive. Any legislation or administrative action must deal with them and here also the results of experimentation in a limited initial arena would provide guidance for application elsewhere to strengthen BOCES and encourage further evolution in its form and functions.

If a city board were to join a common county or regional BOCES system, the problem of representation would occur and must be resolved based on experience with efforts to promote joint county-city sharing of power and funds in the administration and planning of noneducational services. For in joining, a city board in the nature of things will have to give up some control of its own special services plant, personnel, and funding arrangements to a larger group and to new policy directives of the State.

The rights and privileges of a countywide or regional BOCES system in the management of existing city special

services plant, such as vocational high schools and facilities and classes for the handicapped and retarded, is a complex issue that will require investigation, preferably in a specific area and with the cooperation of all local parties concerned. At present, of course, there is some use of large city facilities by students from suburban districts. A study by the Rochester Bureau of Municipal Research of Monroe County schools states that in the 1967-68 year about 234 children from suburban districts were enrolled in seven Rochester city schools under a contractual arrangement with BOCES which paid their tuition. A study by the Western New York School Development Council states that children from 32 suburban districts attend classes in Buffalo city schools under similar contractual arrangements. A common BOCES organization, however, would require true sharing and joint planning rather than an emphasis on contractual relations of the kind now used.

The suspicions and mutual hostility that now exist between cities and the rest of their urban area have proven an obstacle to easy solution of small scale joint service arrangements much less sensitive than those involving school children. The rivalry is in part political, reflecting social and economic differences, but it is also a reflection of basic conflict over power and patronage. No politician or administrator willingly gives up control of dollars or personnel or policy

prerogatives, however minor, and this issue also leads to duplication of school facilities in small cities which do not enter into a BOCES financing and management arrangement, despite the fiscal incentives in the program designed to overcome this and promote BOCES services.

Under present procedures for electing a BOCES board, the city board would have no greater voice and possibly less than a much smaller district in any larger form of BOCES. BOCES boards are not representative of member districts, having five to nine members elected at an annual meeting by members of component boards with no weighting of votes on the basis of pupil enrollment or importance as a BOCES customer or any other measure of importance in the regional school system. No large board could be expected to become responsible for a share of a common BOCES administrative costs or place control over its facilities in the hands of such a board under these arrangements.

The problem has arisen in Monroe County. Senator Thomas Laverne of Rochester, chairman of the Joint Committee on Metropolitan areas, pursuing its program of regionalism, submitted a bill on behalf of the committee with Senator John Flynn of Yonkers as cosponsor in the 1969 session to permit the consolidation of the Big Five boards into a countywide BOCES with the consent of the Commissioner, the city school

board, and the merged BOCES representing the suburban districts in Monroe County. The bill was S.4465. The new BOCES board would become a representative one with voting for membership determined on the basis of votes of component boards weighted on the basis of weighted average daily attendance.

The bill, however, had to be amended as a result of local experience to provide that no single member would have more than a one-third portion of the total votes in proceedings calling for a vote, a reflection of suburban desires not to be overwhelmed by the city school board. This same feeling proved a very large problem in creating the Metropolitan Toronto School Board in the early 1950's. It was found necessary to balance city and suburban interest by giving the city board 10 representatives on the new regional board, each with one vote, and each of 10 suburban districts one member with one vote when the board was created. This was not a precise means of representing either the city-suburban balance or the importance of each district since suburban districts varied greatly in size. But it did strike a workable political solution.

To include the Big Five systems, therefore, in a broader regional organization the new board must be

conceived of as a federation of component districts in whose basic policy-making decisions the members would have a voice based on some measure of their size.

It would be cumbersome to have each member represented directly, although boards of 15 members might be feasible in some areas; in these cases the presidents of districts would appear logical choices as representatives. Powers of representatives might be limited to voting for board members and for such matters as budgets, capital plans, and major policies at policy meetings scheduled monthly. A relatively small board elected annually or possibly for 2 or more years at a representative assembly could function effectively.

Flexibility is important here and the State should move experimentally to develop one or a few such federations where local support is available to work out the many problems involved. Attempting to develop a comprehensive "program" on paper of wide application involves greater risks of irrelevance than working out the problems in practice. It would be wise to consider a "pilot" or demonstration project in which the Commissioner, using funds available at his discretion, could finance the initial studies and planning of such a federation in a given area in conjunction with State officers at the highest level of the Department.

Some form of fiscal incentive would appear necessary to promote the purposes of a regional federation in those areas involving a Big Five system in which the resulting organization would exercise some responsibility for planning the use of city facilities. In the above-mentioned bill, a "carrot" was included in the form of a bonus of State aid equal to 10 percent of the total State aid paid to the new BOCES above the aid due it under existing formulas. The bonus would be paid for 5 years after formation of the countywide board, then reducing by one percentage point per year until the extra aid bonus was eliminated. This particular device may or may not prove practicable but others are available.

The evolution of federated or representative boards in populous urban areas will raise the issue of a lack of uniformity in structure since it can be expected that such existing traditional boards as that in Nassau will not move to a federated form and, given the need for more experience in such counties, probably should not for the near future. The development of a few federated boards first should be seen as an experiment in the evolution of new school government institutions.

The primary reason for this emphasis on gradualism, however, is that a federated BOCES including a large city

will involve rethinking the future course of the regional instrument so created, the extent of its powers, and its functions or activities. At present throughout the State, BOCES is a fairly primitive extension of an individual district, a cooperative service enterprise selling services to members who wish them on a charge-back basis with sharing of administrative costs. Although independent elements of the school government system, they have no significant independent power such as that of taxation or financing and holding property as other school governments have.

Where federation is accomplished, the dynamics of local innovation and evolution can be expected to take over. It is likely that such a federation will explore new forms of shared responsibilities and decision-making techniques and search for new arenas of activity. The Metropolitan Toronto experience here can serve as a guide, with all due respect to the very great differences in state-local relations and city-suburban relations on either side of the border. The Toronto experience indicates that at first a great deal of joint planning and common facilities use can be arranged for the highest cost services in which BOCES are strong and then slowly explore the feasibility of joint planning for other issues such as collective bargaining, rationalizing, staffing, and construction standards, ameliorating disparities in tax resources and spending and promoting greater State

and Federal aid. Armed with only the simplest elements of joint administration and planning a regional board that is the creature of its members directly will serve as a forum in which each district leadership will take the measure of each other's problems and proceed to determine the priorities of issues they should confront together.

The State should lead this evolution, not impose it, by developing incentives to joint planning to enhance open communication and sharing among members. Planning activities are the most important joint enterprise that can take place immediately and the most important initial activity that can energize regional cooperation.

The State should consider legislation to provide for a planning grant fund available to the Commissioner to distribute to qualified BOCES both for specific or categorical planning projects as well as for more general ones as determined by the board itself, particularly those dealing with such issues as taxes, relations with general governments, and capital programming. The employment of State funds for such projects should be grounded on a policy of building up expertise within the staffs of regional BOCES and thus strengthening their capacity to manage their affairs on behalf of members. Such a program

could, of course, be extended to all BOCES.

Here again flexibility is essential; it is difficult to predict what any regional group might wish to undertake. A useful device, employed by the State and the Federal governments, to promote comprehensive regional planning of many public works programs and assure their compliance with a broad range of local desires, could well be employed by the State here. This is the technique of construction planning review and program aid review. The State might demand that certain programs or projects desired by any school government within a given area be first submitted to the regional board for review and comment before being considered for State aid qualification. This could include special services programs and facilities or any major capital project; the opportunities for imaginative and creative administrative procedures here are very great. How to define what is a "reviewable" project and what precisely are the powers and duties of the reviewing agency, and the procedures it must follow are complex issues. The experience of regional planning agencies for noneducational services can be studied as well as those of county planning departments which have a review and approval power over zoning changes made by local

governments within counties. In this way the regional board would be equipped with the rudiments of planning intelligence and, depending upon the terms and conditions of the board's review powers, would also be equipped with significant power to influence local decisions to conform with regional planning. The outlines of what constitutes regional services and how apparently unrelated projects actually affect others would become clear to local officials and members of the regional board. As a regional board develops, the review procedures could be extended and strengthened. Undoubtedly legislation to effect review would be required since the process involves significant diminution of complete local district control over its activities; here too an experimental approach should be undertaken with permissive legislation designed for initial experiments in even one region.

Such considerations raise the issue of the relationship of two types of regional planning efforts now underway to the basic problems of developing BOCES into a regional instrument.

The 16 regional planning centers, which spend about \$2.5 million a year, are the most important sources for planning activities of the type that could and should be

undertaken by regional boards composed of officials responsible to the people. The relationship of the two groups poses problems of duplication, waste of the very limited funds available for planning, and the need for coordination. These problems also arise from such efforts as the computer services project of the Division of Educational Management Services which has invested some \$500,000 of Federal funds and will undoubtedly save many times that amount in the coordination of computer services.

The regional Title III centers are useful in many ways. But they have certain limitations. A State regionalism policy aimed at strengthening BOCES as a regional decision-making agency closely related to the school governments of the State may require separate State funding of such regional planning. The centers encompass very large areas in some cases, only part of which are the urban areas likely to be organized within the regional or county BOCES at first and probably for some time to come. The Western New York School Development Council, the Title III planning center for the Niagara Frontier, for example, covers eight counties of which one, Erie, contains the bulk of the school population.

The Genesee Valley Development Association, the Title III center that includes the Rochester region, covers nine counties most of which are rural. This tends to dilute their interest in studies devoted to only a small part of their membership and territory, although the Western New York center has made excellent studies of school organization problems for Erie and Niagara Counties. There is also some hostility and competitiveness between the planning centers and BOCES and, in many cases, a simple disengagement. In only a few areas is there overlapping membership or other forms of administrative coordination among them.

It appears that the time has come for the State to face up to the need for a great deal more regional planning funds from its own resources. The purposes of a regionalism policy cannot be well served by Federal funds deployed under Federal guidelines drawn for other purposes than those determined by the Commissioner and the Legislature. The needs of urban school governments for applied research and "down to earth" planning of hard and immediate concerns warrant differentiating planning activities into those that can best be served by the regional centers and those to be undertaken by regional federations and regular BOCES on a

county and multicounty basis as determined by them and the Commissioner. Planning is effective only if it is wedded to the needs and concerns of those with the power to make decisions to implement the plans and on the key issues of regionalism, involving school services and the money to pay for them; it is the school board presidents who have that power and who should exercise direct control over planning.

The computer services or data processing project is an example of functional planning with great potential for encouraging regionalism and strengthening BOCES throughout the State if more closely related to the major goals of a regionalism policy, that of developing comprehensive regional boards covering all school governments in metropolitan areas and in which all boards are members. The project is designing a data processing program and the capacity to manage it in cooperation with several larger BOCES, such as by Erie Number One, for use as a model by other BOCES. It contemplates the development of 12 major computer service centers throughout the State. The first four of these BOCES centers to come into being in the near future will be operated by Erie One, the Albany-Schenectady-Schoharie, Nassau,

and Westchester Two. State personnel work closely with the staffs of these BOCES which then service other BOCES and school districts. The Erie One installation, for example, is linked with Erie Two and the Niagara-Orleans BOCES and is designed to serve them jointly.

By building up the expertise to manage a complex computer service within the BOCES organizations, the project hopes to develop centers that can handle the daily paperwork of school systems, explore the use of computers in classroom instruction and their use for research. The actual operation will be in the hands of one BOCES in each of 12 regions. The other BOCES in each region will contract with the administrative BOCES.

Such centers, however, have the difficult task of attempting to rationalize the extremely haphazard and uncoordinated state of existing computer services. In reporting on the project, the State coordinator, Richard C. Lesser, said that the growth of data processing services has taken place with remarkable speed but with little system, a condition, of course, that applies to a great many other services. BOCES expenditures alone have grown at the rate of 40 percent a year during the last few years and about 300 districts are now serviced. In

addition, over 60 districts have their own computer installations and they too service others. The equipment, nature of the programs, and quality of the services are very diverse and unequal.

This project of course would be greatly enhanced as a regional building tool if at least the Big Five cities were included in the BOCES organization and BOCES had the power to order a more systematic arrangement; at present the development of computer services in the hands of the larger BOCES adds to the duplication already evident. The computer project is more concerned with technical matters than ones relating to basic organization of school governments and departmental policy should be brought to bear to make the terms and conditions under which State aid is disbursed to pay for district computer installations a force to rationalize the developing system. This is difficult without regional BOCES that include the larger school systems. Here is one example where establishment of the basic regional organization would prove useful in administering a service program of importance to all school units.

Such divergence, however, should not provoke concern

at this time. Undoubtedly a great many issues of how a consolidated regional BOCES designed as a federation or large versions of existing ones should relate to major programs will demand exploration but they should be dealt with as they arise after a number of them are in being. Once such issues arise at the local level, as they undoubtedly will, they can be debated among local officials and citizens themselves and this is the first step in developing the process by which local officials can manage metropolitan educational services more effectively than they now can divided into parochial and often hostile camps, into "city" and "suburban" districts and into "rich" and "poor" ones. Indeed, even what constitutes "special" services and the appropriate role of a regional organization in planning, financing and managing them will likely change rapidly once a strong regional BOCES organization is in place. Such issues as whether a regional board should have the power to raise its own revenue or capital funds are best handled when and if a regional group, after an initial period of planning on a regional basis, does in fact raise it and seek specific authority. These are complex problems that require

more experience than now exists in any region in the State; while the State should seek to encourage such debate and supply the funds necessary to promote the groundwork planning and intelligence gathering on which it must rest, its role should be based on the fundamental premise that local school government officials themselves must decide the basic issues.

Regionalism is no panacea for reducing the burden of providing quality education nor diminishing the role of the Education Department but it can help equalize that burden and promote more effective local contributions in both money and efficient management by enhancing the capacity of local districts to perceive the extent of the problems themselves. Indeed, a regional approach to school government would illuminate the great unfilled demands for educational services of all kinds, increase the expectations of citizens for better services, and lead to more effective local spending. One might also expect that a regional board, armed with comprehensive planning capability, would highlight the great waste of resources implicit in gross disparities in taxables, underutilized physical plants and competition among districts for limited talent. Nor will a regional

board avoid conflict; indeed, the conflict between city and suburban, rich and poor districts would probably come out in the open with greater vigor. But such boards would permit these conflicts, which span the spectrum of all educational services, to be seen clearly at the local level and debated there rather than in Albany or in newspapers. Through a regional organization as proposed all school boards could apply themselves to basic problems of metropolitan area educational concerns and in so doing begin the process of resolving those conflicts themselves.